

Senegal Project Broadens U.S. Technology Assistance to Africa

During the next three years, 200 cyber cafés and 360,000 small businesses across Senegal will benefit from the \$6.5 million Digital Freedom Initiative (DFI), launched by the Bush administration March 4 at the White House.

In Senegal, Nigeria, and many other developing countries, access to the internet is spotty, frustrating, and time consuming. Even in major cities, a businessperson might wait several days to obtain a telephone connection to an internet provider, and then wait more hours as documents and images download at slow transmission rates.

Internet access and other computer technologies are needed to contact customers, order goods, check prices of farm and industrial goods, apply for loans, seek scholarships, and for thousands of other purposes.

Billions of people lack the skills, knowledge, and market access that high technology can provide. DFI will begin to help bring some of those people into the mainstream by sending volunteers to train them and by promoting a friendly business and legal environment.

USAID teamed up with the departments of Commerce and State; the USA Freedom Corps; the Peace Corps; leaders of Senegal; and Cisco Systems, Hewlett Packard, and other large U.S. firms to announce the DFI's Senegal pilot program—an example of public-private partnership for development.

The Agency will contribute \$2 million, and private U.S. companies will donate \$4.5 million in services in the form of four-month tours by computer experts who will train Senegalese. USAID will pay travel and lodging for each expert and for additional graduate business-school students who will help expand high technology applications.

The benefits of the program will go to low-income people such as banana farmers, market vendors, and small borrowers; to middle-sized firms such as

cyber cafés and telephone centers; and to larger information technology and software firms.

If the Senegal project goes well, DFI will expand to 20 more countries over the next five years.

Commerce Secretary Donald L. Evans said the initiative “reflects President Bush’s determination to encourage innovative foreign assistance policies that encourage wealth creation, economic and political freedom, the rule of law, and human rights.”

Evans and Administrator Natsios briefed the President at the White House just prior to the launch ceremony.

Cisco Systems Chairman John Morgridge recalled that even though his company once gave away free computer routers to African countries, some “never left the box because people did not know how to use [them].”

Hewlett Packard Chairman and CEO Carly Fiorina said her company got involved after the popular Senegalese singer Youssou N’Dour sought help for locally owned cyber cafés, windows onto the world beyond the village for millions of people in developing countries. ★

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Children are introduced to computers at a U.S. government-financed TechnoFair in Tambacounda, Senegal